

SUGAR PINE RAILROAD GRADE

Stanislaus National Forest

On Forest Route 5N02, 0.8 miles North of Beardsley Dam Spillway

Strawberry vicinity

Tuolumne County

California

HAER CA-2308

HAER CA-2308

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

PACIFIC WEST REGIONAL OFFICE

National Park Service

U.S. Department of the Interior

1111 Jackson Street, Suite 700

Oakland, CA 94607

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD**SUGAR PINE RAILWAY GRADE****HAER No. CA-2308**

Location: Three railroad grade segments of the historical Sugar Pine Railway are located in the Strawberry vicinity, Forest Service Road 5N02, 0.8 miles north of Beardsley Dam Spillway, Stanislaus National Forest, Tuolumne County, California. The segments are at latitude 38.216364, longitude -120.066403. This coordinate is based on Geographic Positioning Satellite data. The coordinate's datum is North American Datum of 1983. The location of the resource has restrictions on its release to the public due to artifacts located at the site.

Date of Construction: 1929

Designer: R.E. Jackson of Thomas & Meservey, Portland, Oregon

Builder: Marsh Brothers

**Present Owner/
Occupant:** Stanislaus National Forest/Tri-Dam Project

Present Use: Forest Service road and campground.

Significance: The Sugar Pine Railway standard-gauge grade is a historic property in the Stanislaus National Forest. The railroad grade resources are significant for their association with Sierra Nevada mountain range railroad logging, Tuolumne County extractive industry, and as remnants of a type of logging system that is no longer utilized. The period of significance spans from 1929 to 1963.

Historian: Kevin (Lex) Palmer, March 2013.

**Project
Information:** Tri-Dam and Stanislaus National Forest sponsored the Sugar Pine Railway grade documentation for recreational improvements required under the Federal Regulatory Energy Commission license for the Beardsley-Donnells Hydroelectric Project (FERC No. 2005). Kevin (Lex) Palmer of HDR Engineering prepared the historical report. David De Vries of Mesa Technical performed the large format photography and archival print production.

Part I. Historical Information

A. Context and Physical History:

In 1897 New York financier Thomas S. Bullock began efforts to establish the Sierra Railway Company to access timber patents he purchased in the Sierra Nevada Mountain range. Bullock partnered with the French Prince Poniatowski, and San Francisco banker W. H. Crocker, and oversaw completion of the standard gauge Sierra Railway from the city of Oakdale in the Central Valley to Jamestown in Tuolumne County. When completed in 1901, the Sierra Railway penetrated further into the Sierra Nevada than any other railroad in California, excepting the transcontinental Central Pacific.¹ This line would provided mainline access for the soon-to-be-constructed Sugar Pine Railway.

The Standard Lumber Company Tenure: 1903-1920

Thomas Bullock's numerous business interests included the Standard Lumber Company incorporated in 1899.² The company owned three mills and a sash and door factory located adjacent to the Sierra Railway's docking yard in Sonora.³ Bullock reasoned that the company would be more efficient if a spur was added to the existing railroad line to transport timber from the forests to the market place.

The Sugar Pine Railway incorporated on February 24, 1903 with plans to establish sixty miles of track east from the Sonora locale to the Big Tree Grove in Calaveras County. By late 1903, workers had laid nine miles of track.⁴ Logging of sugar pine and ponderosa pine began immediately in the surrounding forest. By 1907, the Sugar Pine Railway tracks had reached the Lyons Reservoir adding five miles to the previous route.⁵ At Lyons Creek, to the east of the reservoir and at the east terminus of the Sugar Pine, an incline was built to connect the Sugar Pine Railway with the Empire City Railway. Construction activity under Bullock's tenure had now completed. He then worked to transfer the railway ownership to the Standard Lumber Company, and arrange for conveyance rights to allow Sugar Pine trains passage over the Sierra Railway tracks with the purpose of reaching two spurs, a mill, and a shop located in Sonora.⁶ This was an important transaction for the Sierra Railway, which had been built primarily to carry passengers and gold mining-related freight. Sierra Nevada hard rock gold mine production had declined and decreased the need to ship ore from mines to crushing mills. Timber became a more valuable commodity to haul and thus emphasis was placed on transporting the raw and finished wood product via the railroads.

¹ Dorothy Newell Deane, *Sierra Railway* (Berkeley: Howell-North, 1960), 318. Charles M. Coleman, *P.G. and E. of California. The Centennial Story of Pacific Gas and Electric Company 1852-1952* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1952), 165.

² Pamela Connors, *The Sugar Pine Railway History of a Sierran Logging Railroad*. 2nd ed. (Big Oak Flat: *Yosemite Highway Herald*, 2002), 1. N. A., "Timber!" *The Quarterly* 6 (1967):188.

³ *The Quarterly*, 188.

⁴ Connors, *The Sugar Pine Railway*, 7.

⁵ California State Railroad Commission, "In the Matter of Ascertaining the Value of the Property of the Sugar Pine Railroad" (Sacramento: California State Archives, 1915), 2.

⁶ Manuel J. Marshall, *Sugar Pine Railroad* (Sonora: Tuolumne County Historical Society, 1991), n.p.

The Sugar Pine Railway trains hauled logs out of the woods to mills across the fourteen miles of standard gauge rail from Lyons to Ralph.⁷ The line was extended to Rushing in 1912 slightly east of Lyons Reservoir.⁸ The Sonora mill closed that year and milling operations moved to the new town of Standard located two miles west of Ralph Station.⁹ The Standard Lumber Company constructed a six-mile railroad line from the Sugar Pine line at Rushing, to Camp Fraser which remained the east terminus for years.

The Empire Mill and significant stands of timber owned by the Standard Lumber Company burned down in 1913. A few years later, the Standard Lumber Company could not obtain insurance for its remaining mills located in the forest.¹⁰ This signaled an end for California lumber mills being located in forested settings. Harvested logs were hauled out of forests to centralized lumber mills located in urban settings from this point onward.¹¹

Pickering Railroad and Lumber Company Tenure: 1921-1955

The Sugar Pine Railway and Standard Lumber Company sold in 1921 to W. R. and W. H. Pickering, who changed the name of their acquisitions to the Pickering Railroad and Pickering Lumber Company, respectively. The Pickeringings significantly expanded logging activity on over 428,000 acres of forest lands to supply the Tuolumne County mills. The Sonora mill itself manufactured 400,000 doors annually during the 1920s period of prosperity.¹²

Bullock originally established the Sugar Pine Railway to reach the massive sequoia trees at Big Grove in Calaveras County. The Pickeringings began efforts in 1925 to achieve Bullock's goal and to access the estimated four billion board feet of timber located along the Middle Fork of the Stanislaus River. W.A Pickering hired consulting engineer R.E. Jackson to survey the locale and locate terrain that had suitable rail grade topography and supervise its construction. Jackson worked for the Portland-based Thomas & Meserve firm that specialized in forest engineering. During the fall of 1925 and spring of 1926, Jackson and his crew surveyed the area and marked a route from Beardsly Flat north to Soap Creek Pass (refer to Figure 1 below).¹³ During the summer of 1926, Marsh Brothers and Gardenier, Incorporated workers constructed portions of the new grade at Schoettgen Junction (situated two miles above Lyons Reservoir) to divert trains from the old Standard Lumber Company line toward Schoettgen Pass.¹⁴ The line would later be extended to Soap Creek Pass.

⁷ California State Railroad Commission, 1913, 3.

⁸ California State Railroad Commission, "Physical Valuation of the Sugar Pine Railroad as of June 30, 1913." (Sacramento: California State Archives, 1914), 2.

⁹ E.H. Hodge, "Condensed Histories of East Belt Communities of Tuolumne County" *The Quarterly* 1 (1961): 3.

¹⁰ Adolph Hungry Wolf, *Rails in the Mother Lode* (Burbank: Darwin Publications, 1978), 121.

¹¹ Lawrence Shoup, Shelly Davis-King, and Susan K. Goldberg, *Cultural Resources Investigations for the Phoenix Hydroelectric Project License Application (FERC 1061)* (San Francisco: Pacific Gas and Electric Company, 1988), 22.

¹² Hungry Wolf, 121.

¹³ Connors, 118, 121.

¹⁴ Connors, 121.

Beardsley Flat Logging Camp and Reservoir

Beardsley Flat located along the Middle Fork of the Stanislaus River provided ideal topography to base logging operations so as to access the vast timber tracts in the locale. Reaching this area proved one of the most difficult construction feats for the Sugar Pine Railway. During the 1927 construction season work took place in the Middle Fork canyon downstream from the flat. It required costly and time-consuming cutting into granite which resulted in the nickname "Million Dollar Road," for the construction costs per mile associated with this segment. Work was completed on a steel bridge that crossed the Middle Fork by Chinaman Creek below the flat in July 1929, and the new route was in place at Beardsley Flat with its distinctive loop located on the northeast side of the flat. Marsh Brothers workers built the standard-gauge grade at this location using Giant Powder to blast rocks out of the railroad grade and by clearing out trees. They installed iron drainage culverts to carry snow melt water away from the grade during the spring. Laborers cut the grade through hillocks and extended the line from the Beardsley Camp loop northeast to access timber tracts.

Pickering also established the Beardsley Flat camp for its logging crews in 1929 (refer to Figure 2 below). As these new improvements began to be used the 1929 Black Friday stock market crash occurred. This economic downturn ended the 1920s construction boom that lumber companies had supplied. The Pickerings halted logging operations from 1931 to 1936. Curtailed logging operations by the Pickerings began in 1937 using Dry Meadows as a base. Camp Beardsley no longer housed logging crews, having been replaced by section and railroad operations maintenance crews. By 1938, Pickering began using trucks to haul logs, a trend that increased over time and ultimately resulted in the demise of the Sugar Pine Railway.¹⁵

The Last Years of Operation: 1956-1965

As early as 1924, the Beardsley Flat area had been studied as a dam site for the Oakdale and South San Joaquin irrigation districts. This did not reach fruition until the late 1950s, when construction began on three dams along the river that became known as the Tri-Dam Project. Pickering Lumber was forced to relocate its logging camp, Camp Beardsley, in 1956, and portions of the railroad grade and the former logging camp disappeared under the waters of the newly formed Beardsley Reservoir. Workers laid rails across the top of the dam to allow the Sugar Pine Railway trains to traverse the now-flooded Beardsley Flat so as to access the Soap Creek Pass segment to the west.¹⁶

The efficiency of trucks with their flexibility to traverse both paved and unpaved roads economically outweighed the benefits of logging trains with their ability to haul larger loads. Workers removed thirty-two miles of the main line rails between Soap Creek Pass and Schoettgen Pass in 1963. By December 1963, the rail crossing over Beardsley Dam was converted to a road to allow trucks to carry logs to rail cars at Schoettgen Pass. The last Sugar Pine Railway train made a run on the remaining rails between Lyons Pass and Standard in December 1965, ending over sixty-five years of operation.¹⁷

¹⁵ Connors, 123, 151, 364.

¹⁶ Connors, 364, 194.

¹⁷ Connors, 196.

After the Pickering railroad logging operation ended the Stanislaus National Forest established a campground in the former Camp Beardsley location. The environment surrounding the segments consists of Sierra Nevada range lower montane zone vegetation consisting of incense cedar and sugar pine trees, and understory formed by native grasses, mountain misery, and manzanita. Beardsley Reservoir is located immediately to the east. Workers removed the rails and ties from the grade after it had been abandoned. This made conversion of the former grade for use as a campground road easy for the Forest Service.

Intact portions of the Sugar Pine Railway at Camp Beardsley have been documented as Segments A, B and F (refer to Figure 3 below). None of the segments have retained their ties or rails. Segment A of the railroad grade trends north of Segment B near where Segment F begins. Segments F and B appear to be part of a former siding located along the main Sugar Pine Railway line.

Segment A is a dirt surface railroad standard-gauge grade spur. It trends northeast and is 2,299' long and 12' wide (refer to Figure 3 below). The east end of the grade terminates in the Beardsley Reservoir. No rails or wood ties are present and the grade has two drainage culverts installed in 1929. Features 1 and 2 are metal culverts located beneath Segment A that channel water underneath the grade to a natural drainage. Feature 1 is a 16"-diameter, 15'-long iron culvert buried 3' below the grade surface. Thirty local granite boulders are on the northeast side and ten boulders on the southwest side where the culvert ends surface. Feature 2 is a second historic age culvert also installed to capture natural drainage and carry it away from the grade. The culvert is a 16"-diameter, 17'-long iron pipe buried 2'-5" below the grade surface. One local granite boulder is visible on the east side of the grade immediately on top of the pipe. None are visible on the west side.

Segment B is a 525'-long and 12'-wide dirt railroad grade with a northeast alignment that extends from Forest Service Road 5NO2 to an earthen berm. A 40'-high cut extends along the entire length of the segment. A section of heavily deteriorated asphalt paving is located at the northeast end of the segment.

Segment F is a 432'-long and 11'-wide dirt surface railroad grade located at the base of a steep slope. It is a portion of the Sugar Pine Railway main line and has a southwest-northeast semi-circle configuration. A portion of the grade cuts through a finger ridge that descends from the steep slope, and forms a manmade berm along the eastern margin of the grade.

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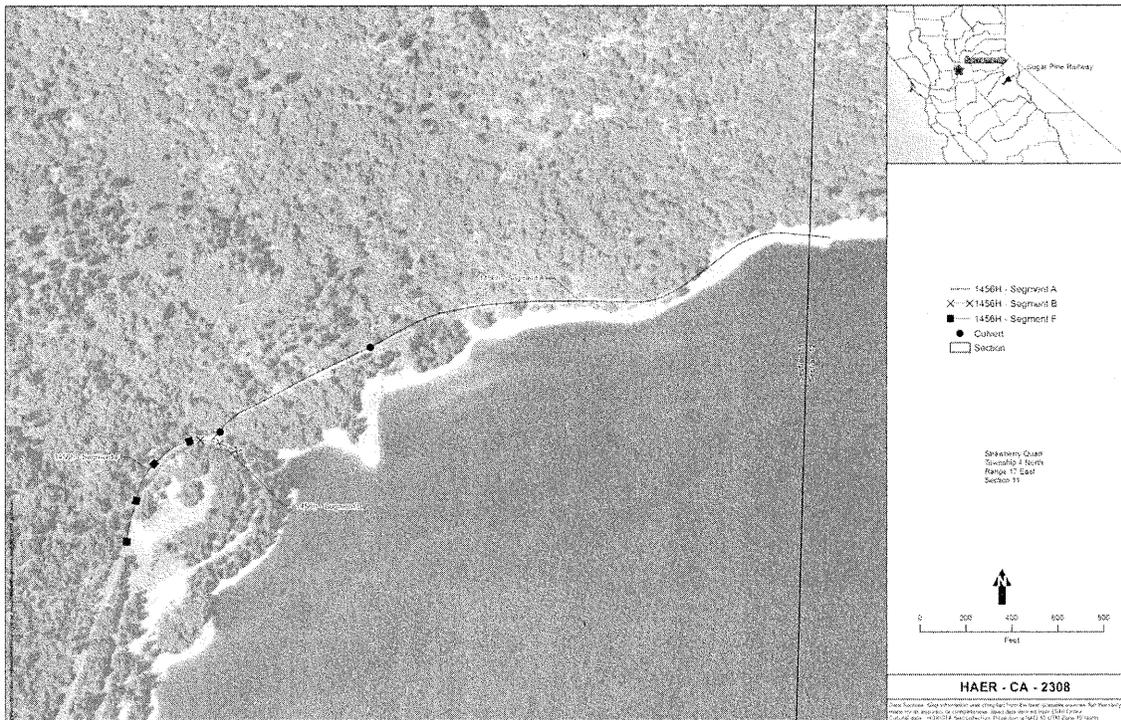


Figure 3. Sugar Pine Railway segments A, B, and F.